

Virginia of the Air Lanes

A ROMANCE OF FLYING

By Herbert Quick

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CHAPTER VII.

THEODORE resolved that he must lie to the shed in the gulf dunes, complete the flying machine and bring it to the notice of the world in spite of the enmity of Mr. Shayne, upon which he now confidently counted. He must—"I know," broke in Mr. Craighead, gazing at the ceiling through wreaths of smoke, "the yearnings of your tropical Alabamian system. But be practical. You come to this emporium, of which, alas, neither of us is fated to be an alumnus, and you find me in fine fettle save that I am unrelated to the world. I am an Antioch, with no immediate prospects of getting my tooties to mother earth's storage but, insulated from the mass of demoralized humanity; a great force for a number of things, with no way of proving it. What do you do? You make a profession for me. I was taught, not to mention naught. What am I now? A great personal injury lawyer, developing into a prosperous ambulance chaser. I was out of touch with the world of finance. I have now laid the foundation for the organization of the great Carson-Craighead Aeronaut Corporation!"

"What do you mean?" ejaculated Carson.

"What I say! What I say! Through a long, colonnaded, peristyle vista of marble and onyx I can see called to the back fence the hide of Mr. Finley Shayne."

"But I have no clothes," Carson urged.

"Clothes?" scornfully repeated Craighead. "What are they? Merely woven fabrics to fill bags to secure credit withal at hotels. And you need no credit, for this room is mine for the whole term of the treatments paid for by some one into whose company I dropped or rose during my last shore leave from the good ship Lillith, but by whom I have no idea. Clothes, indeed! Scat!"

"But it's cold here," persisted Carson, feeling helpless in the coils of this serpentine logic. "I'm not prepared for this climate."

"Look abroad!" commanded Craighead, with a gesture toward the window. "The sun beats down upon the last remnants of the snow, and the little brooks stir the glad ba-ba to the river and send down the silky billet doux of the catkin to remind him that they've busted loose and are hurling themselves into his arms. Why, damn you, it's spring! And you can stay right here—steam heat, bath, hot and cold water, padded cell in connection—oh, fair youth, I love thee! Let me finish bunking Mr. O'Grady and start the Aeronaut company. Don't be a clam!"

"You know how I feel about those damages, but if I could get the capital for the aeroplane?"

"Why, you don't doubt my practical genius, do you?" queried Craighead in astonishment—"in other people's affairs, I mean, of course? Why, sir, if in view of my failure with my own I can't handle other people's business then what becomes of my ability? I tell you, haughty southern, I'm good for something! I have found a billionaire, and you shall meet him."

All that day Carson watched Craighead. From a trunk covered with the labels of foreign travel Craighead took a sheet of cardboard and painted upon it an elaborate sign which bore the legend, "Craighead, Attorney and Counselor at Law." This he fastened outside the door, chucking from time to time as the passer-by paused as if to read it. After awhile he added to it "Personal Injury Cases a Specialty."

Craighead went out late and brought back several legal looking books, which he ranged upon the dresser by dust-fornidability—an old set of Illinois statutes and a tattered Broom's "Legal Maxims," from which he read unctuously such Latin aphorisms as "De minimis non curat lex," "Falsus in uno, falsus in omnibus," and the like, and lectured upon them very informatively. The remainder of the library consisted of a ten years' file of Martindale's Legal Directory, containing nothing more authoritative than lists of the world's lawyers.

"Where did you get them?" asked Theodore.

"Secondhand man," replied Craighead, "on approval. We must keep up appearances even if we have to buy 'em."

They went out for a walk to give O'Grady a chance, as Craighead expressed it, to see what he was up against, a statement that mystified Theodore greatly.

On their return Mr. O'Grady seemed to have been wrought upon by what he was "up against," for he asked Mr. Craighead if he would be so good as to give him a few minutes. Mr. Craighead looked at his watch, pleaded lack of time and asked Theodore if his business could wait. When Carson admitted that it could O'Grady said "Thank you, sir," in the tone of a porter accepting a tip.

What under heaven had suddenly raised the expelled Craighead from his despised position in the institute to a thing to inspire terror and panic Theodore could not imagine nor guess the reason for Craighead's sardonic laughter as he sat in their room drawing indictments against O'Grady and Witherspoon. He saw, however, that these were awesome documents, which set forth in a large, round hand that these gentlemen had been guilty of obtaining money under false pretenses, false imprisonment, malicious assault and the like, all done "feloniously, of malice prepense and aforethought, not having the fear of God before their

eyes, but indicated abhorrence by the devil," and "against the peace and dignity of the state of Illinois and contrary to the statutes in such cases made and provided."

"Theodore, when we return," said Craighead, "this room will be full of corpses knocked stiff by these impeachment of O'Grady and Witherspoon. Take the spot of the billionaire. Hike—oh, hike—with me!" They crossed a dim field, followed a farm road and came back into the village from the opposite side. Craighead hurried Carson to a broad porch under tall elms and maples knobby with swelling buds. He pushed a button, and they waited.

At slow steps in the hall Craighead squeezed Carson's arm spasmodically. The door opened, and a low figure stood before them in which Theodore noted something familiar, and a voice not altogether strange, he thought, invited them into the "other room."

"Mr. Carson," said Mr. Craighead, "does not recognize in our host the erstwhile guide of his wandering and wobbly feet. Mr. Carson, in your new and fully established capacity as a respectable citizen let me present you to Mr. Waddy, to whose counsel, precept and example while acting as my attendant I feel myself indebted for my complete restoration to Philistinehood. Mr. Carson, Mr. Waddy."

Mr. Waddy, ignoring this reintroduction, led them silently down the hall, past a door, which gave forth scuffling sounds, female voices and the peeping of young chickens, and took them into a snug den, the shelves of which were covered with books—tail, imposing, leaved looking tomes in time darkened bindings—where they sat down in leather covered chairs gray with dust.

"So you did really drop into the garden?" their host finally asked.

"Yes," answered Carson. "I think it was foolish to take the risk, but I did."

"Why?" queried Waddy, and Carson explained.

"Boy foul-mouthed," said Mr. Waddy, and silence fell again, broken at last by Theodore's inquiry as to whether Mr. Waddy was active in eight banks and if he did not find his duties irksome.

"No," replied Waddy. "The things growed up on me. I never wanted to be a banker, but my rents kept loadin' me up with deposits, an' I sort of got one bank after another—damn it—country banks—the boys run 'em. I came here to have a quiet time in my own way, an' see how I make out. They wanted me to put on style. They reckoned I was going to when I bought this place. I could slick up an' go to stockholders' meetings, an' the boys never knowed. An' just as I got things right Caroline's man dies, an' here she comes to 'take care' of me! I shan't be allowed to earn a cent by workin' for Witherspoon, an' it brought me into such society. Them jags is mighty nice fellers, some of 'em."

"I thank you," said Craighead, with an excess of manner. "And as for your being condemned by family pride to sterile uselessness, it is truly a shame. But is Caroline a relative?"

"My daughter," answered Mr. Waddy, "Come to live with me. Settlin' things to rights."

"Mr. Waddy," said Craighead, "bear up under this. It may be for the best. And let us take up Mr. Carson's great project for monopolizing aviation. I have long believed that some one would turn up with the machine to subordinate all others, but since the time of Santos-Dumont, Farman and the Wrights aerial navigation has made no real progress. Mr. Carson is the genius. We offer you the unique chance to be with us comaster of the world. Mr. Carson will be glad to explain his aeroplane."

"I won't put a cent in it!" said Mr. Waddy.

Carson's heart sank.

"Certainly not," replied Craighead, as if Mr. Waddy's refusal were the most natural thing in the world, "until you have ciphered the thing down to brass nalls. And then— But tell Mr. Waddy about it. Mr. Carson. You need not enter into the offers of millions we have had and spurned. Just describe the machine."

Carson switched on the lights, and they gathered about the table.

CHAPTER VIII.

MR. WADDY INVESTS.

THE young man talked slowly. Once in awhile Mr. Waddy interjected a question which evinced intelligent comprehension of the heart of Carson's explanation. Carson explained that his aeroplane differed from all others in having wings like a bird's, which did not flap, like those of the absurd orthopters and yet used half their surface in beating the air with a straight thrust like that of an oar in water.

"Don't yeh use screws?" asked Waddy.

"Not at all," answered Carson. "The screw can never be effective, because it strikes with a slant. It will do in water, but air requires a more effective thrust. When your propeller blade moves at a hundred miles an hour, say, you have a lift of thirty pounds to the square foot of surface with the direct stroke. But the surface of the screw—"

"Now, how d'yeh figger that?" Carson repeated laboriously.

"Why," said Carson, "I can lift weights that none of the other airships can stir and fly off like an eagle with a fish."

The farmer-banker and the inventor were so absorbed that they scarcely noticed the entrance of a messenger from the institute with a message from Mr. O'Grady asking if Mr. Craighead would step outside for a moment nor Craighead's withdrawal and return.

"The direction of the blow of the propeller," said Carson, "is under perfect control. A bird's wing isn't. This is a better wing than an eagle's."

"Kin you raise right straight up," asked Waddy, "without running along like a buzzard?"

"I sure can," replied Carson, falling into dialect. "No bird can do that—no big bird. It's a better, stronger flier than any bird. The best any other machine can do is to support four pounds to the square foot of surface. With my new motors I can fly off with five times that, and I've got four times their bearing surface. I can carry mail and express at a profit or passenger on a ship with good heavy torpedoes and sink her and overtake any vessel that floats. I can—"

"What kind of motors you got?" in-

terrupted Waddy.

Carson went into details. The old man looked through his eyebrows, whiskers and mustaches at Carson and the drawings.

"What if your engines stop," he asked, "when you're a mile high and over water mobile?"

"I can soar," answered Carson. "I can make headway and gain height with no power if there's a wind, and I can stay up for hours with the propellers set for aeroplanes. But the best thing I haven't mentioned—the gyroscopic balancing device."

"What's that?" asked Mr. Waddy.

"Why, it's the successful application of the gyroscope to aviation."

"They used to talk about that," observed Mr. Waddy, "long ago—the Brennan single rail roads. I thought it turned out that the gyroscopes was too heavy for air work."

"They are too heavy," cried Theodore, "if you use them to do the balancing. That's sure. And so we have had to balance by feeling, just as we do a bicycle. Thought isn't quick enough, so you have to rely on feeling, as a bird does. But I use little gyroscopes not to control by their weight and stress, but to distribute power to the wings and rudders—positive, automatic distribution of power. Why, if the engineer of my machine should fall dead it would fly on just as he set it until the fuel was exhausted. It feels and thinks."

"They did not notice the opening of the door nor see the woman who entered."

"Papa," she said.

Mr. Waddy rose hastily and faced her. She looked like Mr. Waddy, but was undeniably pretty. He was blocky and short; she, round and plump, with small hands and feet. The turned up pug nose of Mr. Waddy was modified to a delightful little retroussé effect in her.

"Papa," said she, "this is hardly a place in which to entertain these gentlemen. We have cleared out the east parlor."

"Oh, yes!" assented Mr. Waddy, with feverish haste. "To be sure, Caroline! Take 'em in, won't you? I've got to see the hired man. My daughter, Mrs. Graybill, Mr. Craighead, Caroline, a— a friend of mine, Mr. Carson of Alabama. Excuse me for a minute, gentlemen."

"Snigger," said she, smiling, "will be served every soon."

The long dining room was gloomy with decayed gentility—black beams, dark wall-papering and a broad plate rail bearing wrenches, clevises, oil cans and baskets of eggs labeled as to breeds and dates. Dug the meal Craighead came out amazingly in his encounters with Mrs. Graybill, to whom, as it seemed to Theodore, he was making violent love. Mr. Waddy sat buried in thought, save when he questioned Carson concerning the aeroplane.

"There's no cinch in it," said Mr. Waddy, "no monopoly, an' as soon as it's public everybody'll build 'em. I do business on cinches."

"Oh, but the patents, Mr. Waddy?" cried Craighead. "You forget the patents."

"They expire in a few years," said Mr. Waddy, "an' then where are yeh? Land, now, that I made my money in—land's an eternal cinch."

"Mr. Waddy," said Craighead, "this matter of securing exclusive control of the air is a part of our plans. It is one of my specialties."

Carson was amazed. Mr. Waddy grunted as if lightly impressed, as no doubt he was.

"How long will it take you," said he, "to kind of draw out your plan for cinchin' the control of the air legally?"

"Oh, a very brief time," said Craighead. "I have installed a fine law library in my apartments so the consultation of authorities will be easy, but—"

"Well," interrupted Mr. Waddy, "if you can have that done by the time Mr. Carson can go where his machine is, put it in shape an' fly back it'll do. When he lights in the front yard an' you bring me a good law front monopoly I'll go in with you, but he's got to fetch a letter from Mobile within twenty-four hours of the time it's stamped there. I'm from Missouri! What say?"

"Done!" cried Craighead. Theodore was trembling.

"Before we call it a bargain," said Theodore, "I should like a word with Mr. Craighead if you will excuse me."

"Certainly," said Mrs. Graybill. Craighead faced Carson inquiringly as they found themselves alone in the hall.

"I wish to explain," said Theodore, "that I—I can't pay the charges on the

actual and exemplary. I've settled the case of Carson versus the Slattery Institute. Fair sir, we have a swollen fortune."

"What do you mean?" asked Carson.

"I mean," said Craighead, "that this roll of tainted money is our lot of the emporium. Wit well that I soaked 'em plenty."

"But I can't allow this!" cried Theodore.

"It's already allowed," answered Craighead, with an air of perfect innocence. "Come, callow sir, we can't begin now the ruinous policy of scrutinizing the assets of our supplies. We can endow a college later, and that—What you doink?"

Carson was cramming the bills into his pocket.

"Going back to Mr. Waddy," said he. "Come on."

"Aye, aye, sir," said Craighead, his hand to his forehead. "But I warn you, captaining that boys'—breakers dead ahead and on both bows, and that Craighead's the only pilot as knows these waters. But here's with you, if it's to Dary Jones."

"Mr. Waddy," said Theodore, walking up to him and looking him in the face, "before accepting your offer I must make sure that I can fulfill my part of it. I must install the motors in the aeroplane. There are some financial arrangements to be made. It may be some weeks."

"Till you have what money you need," said Mr. Waddy. "I know how it really is with these here geniuses."

Theodore grasped the old man's hand, his face flushed with joy.

"I accept your advances with pleasure," said he, "and within sixty days I shall be here with the aeroplane."

"As certain," said Craighead, "as the world turns over sixty times on its shafting. Got your order, Mr. Waddy?"

They took their departure.

After retiring they lay awake, exchanging remarks and suggestions about the dark room.

"Oh, about that money?" said Carson. "I must return it to Mr. Witherspoon, Craighead. You don't misunderstand me, will you?"

"Not in the least," replied Craighead sleepily. "Involving conscience and all that rot. Get over it as you get richer, you know. I would fain dream of Caroline."

CHAPTER IX.

THE INCEPTION OF "UNCLE THEODORE."

THEODORE'S mind, habituated to the airy ease of an untried faith in his mastery of the air, felt the goading of reality as he walked westward from the station toward dilapidated Carson's Landing.

Seated on a stump, he sought mental adjustment before entering his house. He had had his chance with Shayne.

"The prince of the powers of the air," had thrown it away in hot words to Shayne, in a blow to Silberberg and by leaping from the Roc into the unknown abyss of night. These were actualities. The broken deflector of the parachute he carried proved that, as did the memory of his foolishness over Shayne's niece, now happily forever past.

Mr. Waddy's money and Mr. Craighead's telegrams saved the day.

The first three yellow dispatches had come in one delivery at Nashville, addressed to "Theodore Carson, the Illustrations Inventor and Thaumaturge, Care Conductor, Train 75." Theodore, the illustrious, could not accumulate the courage to ask for them, but the wise conductor had pounced suddenly upon him and said, "I reckon you're Mr. Carson."

"Yield not to temptation, fear or cold feet," the first read. "Your Uncle Fulter is at the helm." This was signed "The Great Uncalled," with the first two words run together as "Thegreat" in a telegraph operator's effort to reduce to the semblance of a name Mr. Craighead's nom de guerre. The second ran: "Have no fear. Monopoly is as clear in the air as on the land. Apologies to Sir Humphrey Gilbert. None to any one else by a dem slight. Conspuez Shayne." This was signed "Craighead, the Legal Bloodhound."

An old Broom, ran the more mysterious next, "albeit minus one cover and dog's eared, nevertheless sweeps clean. He yokes the whirligig to our car and sweeps the howling skies!" (Signed) "Dandy Jim of Caroline Graybill."

The fourth, delivered at Birmingham, was addressed to General Theodore Carson, M. A. ("Monopolist of the Air"), and consisted of ten repetitions of "Eureka," signed "D. J. of C."

The last came at Bay Minette and was too astonishing to be explained on any theory consistent with Craighead's sobriety and sanity. "Caroline's dad," it read, "falls dead at unveiling of Broom idea. Sees absolute cinch and rises to it as per lifelong custom. Formed today Universal Nitrates and Air Products company. Laws of West Virginia. You come in for 25 per cent. Caroline impressed. Either universal genius or rodents in campaign. Greatly encouraged, not to say titivated. Almost converted to belief in my own schemes and self, but am cautiously suspending judgment. Will have Chicago surrounded by time you return. Go east to Wheeling (or is Charleston capital?) tonight and will incidentally run up and construct first line of circumvallation (see cyclopedia) about Greater New York. Monopoly end of deal absolutely nailed down; brass nalls, with Waddy doubloons coming copious. Up to you to produce flier. Getting wobbly in head. Losing faith in you as concrete entity. Have you any aeroneer? Answer 'Yes' or 'No' at once." This also was signed "D. J. of Caroline."

What could be mean by an "old Broom?" The old copy of Broom's Legal Maxims in Craighead's "library" was indeed minus a cover and dog's eared, but how this "Broom" could, even in metaphor, yoke the whirligig to any car and sweep the howling skies Carson could not guess. Mr. Waddy's demand for aeronautical monopoly was being complied with, to Mr. Craighead's mind, and the last telegram seemed to imply that the illustrious financier had been convinced. His "falling dead" might mean much or little, but his "doubloons coming copious" was eloquent of faith. And what in the name of all the gods at once could a "Universal Nitrates and Air Products company" mean in an

aerial navigation deal of those mysterious expressions about "surrounding" Chicago and Greater New York?

Well, Aunt Chloe was in there, shuffling about, wondering where he might be, and here he was, looking on spectrally and unobserved. With the common human impulse to secret approach, Theodore walked on, concealed between the Spanish bayonets and a somber line of red cedars, climbed the end of the veranda, scuttled into the broad hall and up to his room, into which he stepped quickly, breathing a little harder. He opened the closet for a change of clothes and started back in wonderment quite as paralyzing as horror, for his clothes were gone. Instead there sat a huge trunk with its lid back, its open tray full of silken hosiery, corsets, lace, gloves, handkerchiefs and openwork things of mystery and terror. On the beds were many, many others quite as awful, frilled and ruffled and ruffled and plaited garments, silks, dimities, canuens, linens, cottons and soft light woollens, filling his closet and spread against the wall for occult reasons connected with keeping them in shape, and protruding from the trunk were more clothes, while in corners of the bedroom were more trunks.

A light step sounded, and he froze to a statue of panic and trance and paralysis. Some one entered. His heart bounded and then stood still, for it was Psyche of the dunes, Shayne's niece, Virginia, entering jauntily, maddeningly, like a real woman taking possession of his bedroom as her own! She had a little subjectively derived smile on her lips, held in her hands a spray of huckleberry blooms, which she put to her nostrils and then stuck in a vase by the old mirror.

"Psyche," he stammered.

With a little scream she darted toward the door, recognized him as he emerged from her land on her breast and a quick palpitation in the "V" of her gown, like the heart of a snared robin. Yet she was the least excited of the twain. Her alarm ceased with her recognition of him.

"My robes!" said she in a half whisper. "Oh, I'm so glad!"

"Psyche," said he, "when you say you are glad—"

"Oh, I'm so glad you aren't dashed to pieces!" she cried. "I've seen you falling, falling, falling, in my dreams and never alighting! But evidently you did!"

"Yes," said he, "quite safe. But how came you here?"

"Oh, I live here," said she. "But how did you know? Or did you just happen? Shall I hide you? I'll never betray you, never, no matter what they say you've done!"

"You—belong—here?" repeated Theodore wonderingly. "Here? You—you live here?"

"Yes," said she hurriedly—"with my uncle. I couldn't endure the Shaynes and Silberbergs any longer. Why, the way they did just drives people to crime! And if you did anything it was in open war with the officers and not by stealth as the Shaynes and Silberbergs do. I told them so to their teeth—only you ought to reform and all that, you know. And I couldn't bear Aunt Marie any more," here the voice trembled, "though everybody will say I'm ungrateful and all that. And General Carson's family are all my relatives in the world, except the Shaynes. And this is their plantation—my uncle that I never saw lives here—and I'd rather not have to ask him to shelter a robber the very first thing, and so I hope you aren't pursued. But if you are I'll hide you before I'll see you caught. There!"

Mr. Carson reeled back against the wall, drew his hands across his eyes and looked again. She seemed to be there still, rather nearer than before, hands clasped in adorable anxiety, divinity pity in her eyes.

"Of course it's a shock," said Miss Suarez, "to find you—"

"I am sorry," said Theodore, "to have shocked you by being visible. I—"

"Oh, now," said Miss Suarez. "Try to supply ellipses—and—those things. I meant to find you so—"

"So incapable of—so lacking in the qualities of—of—"

"You're gradually getting closer to it," commented Virginia. "Our danger, where there is nobody hanging about to sort of mitigate—no, not that—to—"

"To absorb and diffuse the shock," suggested the engineer.

"The very word," said she. "Why, uncle, you're clever—once in awhile!"

"Thank you, Miss Virginia. I—"

"Don't interrupt, please. Our danger here in the wilderness is that of not catching the shades of expression. The nuances one has to have ground into one's system with regard to one's friends—if nuances can be ground into anything—and that we'll misunderstand and fight and pull hair needlessly—doesn't that cover the case?"

"I don't think it does quite. But you were saying I lack some quality. Please go on."

"The quality of unclehood," said she. "You don't create the role. I suppose my image of a charming young robber, for you're not bad looking, uncle, you know."

Theodore blushed.

"Piracy and yeggsism and those things are so incompatible with one's only surviving live live-with-able uncle," said Virginia.

"In 'The Babes in the Wood,'" said Theodore, "the uncle was quite that sort."

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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